

# Malta Country Report

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This report is based on 10 female inmates respondents and 6 members of staff working with female and male inmates. The total number of female inmates at the time of the interviews was 38. All the interviews were conducted within two weeks. Inmates were chosen using an “opt-in” method, where members of staff working in the female division (there is only one female division in Malta) asked the prisoners if they wanted to participate in the interview. The first 10 that came forward were interviewed.








## Summary of Female Inmates Responses

Female inmates in Malta are all kept in single cell rooms. They are out of their cells for more than 10 hours a day, where they can attend educational classes, go to work or spend the time chatting in the common area.

The age of the inmates ranged between 21 and 60, with the majority falling in the 30 to 39 year category. They were all sentenced prisoners with the majority being in prison for the first time. Six had a prison sentence that was over 5 years, and only 2 had short sentences of less than 3 months. Most were Maltese with some having a European Nationality. Seven were single with the majority having young children but not their custody. The level of education of most of the respondents was a secondary school level of education, with some having higher education or vocational training (20% for each category). Only one inmate was unemployed prior to incarceration, with some having a substantial employment history. However, one notices that most had unskilled low-paying jobs. This gives credence to the fact that six respondents said that their main source of income was their jobs, followed by being helped by their parents. Interestingly two respondents admitted that their main source of income was illegal activities. Seven respondents lived with their family, maintaining that the social and family network was very important to them, as they feel that without their family or partner's support, making it would be more difficult. Abuse and violence does not seem to form part of their lives, with only three respondents admitting to having experienced domestic physical violence or emotional abuse.

When asked about the type of help they needed when they entered prison, five inmates said that they needed health/mental care help and another three inmates said they needed help with substance abuse. Other issues mentioned were parenting, family, economical and language. Unfortunately three inmates felt that they did not get the help that they needed.

## Help needed on entry into prison






Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Substance abuse intervention		33.3%	3
Health/mental care		55.6%	5
Parenting		11.1%	1
Family issues		22.2%	2
Financial advice		22.2%	2
Employment		0.0%	0
Studying		0.0%	0
Language		11.1%	1
Other, please specify...		22.2%	2
<b>Total Responses</b>			<b>9</b>

When asked about educational programs half of the respondents said that they did not participate in any activities, only three participate in educational programs, one in psychological rehabilitation, one in prison work. The five inmates that did not participate in educational programs have no interest in participating in anything, however there was the mention of more educational programs and substance abuse help. When asked about their hobbies they centered around sports and reading. This might indicate a need to revisit educational programs to try to make them more attractive to the inmates. The inmates are not convinced that the prison offers the courses they need. None said that they totally agree, with only two admitting to “mainly offering what I need”. However 7 chose – ‘few’, ‘not at all’ and ‘not sure’. This indicated that work must be done to assess the prisoner’s perceived and actual needs.

When the inmates were asked to rate their ICT skills, their reading, numeracy and writing skills they all scored them high, with the exception of ICT skills. This might indicate that work in this area needs to be developed. Seven out of ten of the inmates admitted that they are not participating in educational activities. Those that are participating are attending traditional educational classes. The time might have come to address the need of having more skills based classes that might appeal to them more. The inmates themselves said that they prefer vocational training or a skills-based training course, however one must not forget that half of the sample needs motivation to do something with their time, as they consistently say that they are not interested in doing anything. Those that participate in prison education do so because of a desire to learn and a belief in bettering themselves. They also admit that it is a good way of getting out of the cell and doing something positive. Their motivation stems from their family, a desire to change their environment and a thought of a better life. The reasons for not participating in prison








education vary. Most answers centered around the fact that they are not interested, that they have enough education, and that they are not willing to make the effort. Some prefer to work and another admitted that once she gets out of prison she will be a pensioner therefore there is not reason to make the effort

### Reasons for not participating in prison educational activities

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
I am not interested in getting an education in prison		60.0%	3
I already have enough education		80.0%	4
I am not willing to make the effort		40.0%	2
I prefer to work		20.0%	1
I will be a pensioner once I am out		20.0%	1
<b>Total Responses</b>			<b>5</b>

The prisoners also identified certain problems associated with prison educational activities. The most mentioned was that the prison did not offer appropriate courses for them. The Table below summons the responses given. In the other category the respondents said that some courses were offered only for men, that the courses offered where female typical courses such as beautician courses and that it was difficult to get teachers for just one or two inmates. This last comment actually shows that inmates have some insight about the problems that are faced by management

### Problems associated with prison educational activities

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
The prison does not offer any educational programs		30.0%	3
The prison does not offer any educational programs suitable for me		50.0%	5
The conditions for school and studying in the prison are poor		20.0%	2
Inadequate access to ICT equipment		20.0%	2
Inadequate access to literature		10.0%	1
There are too many distractions in prison		10.0%	1
Other, please specify...		30.0%	3
<b>Total Responses</b>			<b>10</b>



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When asked about the positive experiences that those who participated in prison educational activities had inmates mentioned that they could utilize the education after release and that it made them “feel better about themselves”. On the negative side they mentioned that it was a “waste of time” (4 out of 6 respondents), that they felt that the prison staff was not supporting their education and that the content was not as expected.

On a positive note nine out of ten respondents value education as being very important or important. Prison education also was seen as ‘very important’ or ‘important’ by eight out of the ten respondents.

As prisoners do not have an educational counselor they have to rely on correctional officers or information sessions to hear about any educational activities. Four inmates say that they heard about their current education program from security staff, others from the teacher or from the psychologist. Half say they did not get any support.

When asked for their plans on release, half said that they wanted to reactivate family bonds. This shows the importance of family work with inmates while they are in prison. Others mentioned work and starting over. Most have had a good experience with NGOs, this with regards to drug rehabilitation and psychological support. Once they are out of prison, they plan to seek this help once again.

## Summary of Staff responses

The members of staff were asked about female prisoner motivation for educational activities although the majority said that they see no difference between male and female motivation, two said that females were less motivated. This could be the result of the female inmate having more problems. As we saw from the inmate questionnaires, there seems to be a general preoccupation for family and social support. There is also an amount of mental health support that the inmates feel they need. This could be an indication of the lack of motivation that some staff members feel in the female prison population.

Staff thinks that the two most important elements that motivate female prisoners are group/peer pressure and self esteem (50% respectively). This is reflected in the answer of what demotivates female inmates to attend educational activities. The most voted answers being the 'symbiotic relationships' (66.7%), 'peer pressure' (50%) and 'low self-esteem' (33.3%). This brings us once again to the issue of the importance of family life and relationships for the female prisoners.

All respondents maintain that education is a prison priority. The prison is offering a substantial amount of new courses and inmates have a lot of opportunities to study. Ironically still half of the inmates interviewed do not see any relation between the courses and their needs. This is also confirmed when the staff was asked if they current offer meet the inmate's needs, with four out of six respondents answering 'no'. Staff said that there are not enough educational opportunities, they mentioned that they need to study the needs of the inmates, and there is a need for a full-time education system with full-time educators.

Most educational offers centre either around traditional teaching such as language, ICT or other school subjects or skills based education which are traditional female jobs such as cooking, sewing, and beauty therapy. There are few neutral skills jobs such as life skills and sports. Inmates can also apply to go for educational courses outside the prison. This would be dependent on a security check to ensure that the inmate does not pose a threat to society or poses a risk of absconding. Bearing this in mind, theoretically inmates can go to any course that is available outside prison. Inmates can also perform community work.








Unfortunately the prison does not have proper facilities for providing education. More needs to be done in having a proper school where female inmates can go. As it is a room has to be located where classes can be held.

All the staff interviewed feel that it is their duty to motivate inmates to attend educational courses, and most feel that they do have the necessary skill to motivate them. The skills needed

to motivate inmates were seen to be: communication skills (83.3%), information about programs (83.3%), motivation (66.7%), and time (50%).

An organizational change in the form of a change in the Philosophy of the Prison, where education and rehabilitation were given priority was mentioned. Furthermore educational courses should not be used to discipline prisoners i.e. a prisoner should not be prevented from attending courses because he has to undergo punishment. Other problems mentioned were the need to tackle the drug problem and to introduce paid education to reflect paid work. That is prisoners would receive payment if they attended courses in the same manner that they receive payment when they attend work. The table below shows the other categories mentioned, such as more offers in social and psychological therapy (50%). The respondents also mentioned the need for more personal help and age dependent treatment.

### Organizational changes to better prison education

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Female prisons		33.3%	2
More personal		16.7%	1
More offers in social and psychological therapy		50.0%	3
More offers in education		33.3%	2
More offers in vocational training		33.3%	2
More offers in work		33.3%	2
Other, please specify...		66.7%	4
<b>Total Responses</b>			<b>6</b>

#	Others:
1.	Paid education
2.	Tackle drug problems
3.	Discipline
4.	Philosophy of the prison needs changing

When the prison staff was asked about the conditions that prevented change the responses were lack of personnel and lack of finances (66.7% respectively). There was also an insistence of more qualified personnel (83.3%) and a better infrastructure (66.7%).

## Conclusion

Analyzing the responses of the inmate and the staff questionnaires, one cannot but help to notice a parallel between them. The responses show the usual problems found in a prison, such as lack of motivation and the perennial grumbling of prisoners that not enough is being done or given to them. However a closer look at the results point to a number of serious problems that cannot easily be addressed by the personnel. As one of the respondents said: “we need a change in the philosophy of prison” if the prison is to become a real correctional facility.

Due to this we decided that the best way forward was to try to make an impact on the government, the policy makers and management as they are the people most likely to be able to initiate the change that the prison most urgently needs. More personnel, to be precise more qualified personnel, is need in the form of educators, psychologists and social workers working in prison. This would enable the introduction of the educational counselors and sentencing plans.

With half of the inmates interviewed not attending any educational programs and being very reluctant to do so, pointing fingers to lack of support from staff, it is imperative that the role of an educational counselor is introduced. The fact that inmates lack a sentence plan, from the day of admission also points to potential problems. This problem is felt more when prisoners are expected to attend educational/rehabilitation classes and work in order to apply for parole.

The lack of a sentence plan is also affecting the moral of the prisoners. Female inmates have mentioned reactivating family bonds, needing help with mental health issues and needing help with substance abuse as the most pressing problems. We saw that where there is family support, inmates tended to do well. For female inmates the family network is very important, those that have social and family support tend to be more positive, while those that lack this are more negative with less ability to get a desire to change their life. Having the appropriate sentence plan and the necessary psychological and social support would help the inmates. This would in turn give them a better view of their life, giving them the motivation that they lack. Family support and families are the most important element in the female inmate's life, so much so that they seek to substitute it when they are in prison.

There is also the need to have better educational facilities. Having a proper ‘school’ where different educational classes can take place would improve the moral of the workers and the inmates themselves. This coupled by the introduction of ‘Paid Education’ would encourage more inmates to attend classes. As things stand, inmates prefer to perform paid work, even if this work is not teaching them any skills rather than go for educational classes. Money is a commodity, which they cannot do without.

Prison management also needs to see what the inmates want. Prison education is seen as important but more than half of the inmates said that education was “a waste of time” and they felt that staff was not supporting them. There is a need to have a mixture of life skills based classes (two thirds of the sample have lost custody of their children), psychological support classes (a number admitted to being victims of domestic violence and having drug abuse problems), and vocational/ skills based classes instead of traditional chalk and talk classes. The perceived needs of the prisoners are not addressed. The prison needs to do an exercise on the needs of the female inmates before offering any courses. Offering courses for the sake of offering more courses fails to address the problems.

As we become more aware of these problems we have little choice but to try to raise awareness of the people that can do something about the situation, if we want to see a change. The ministry and policy makers are urged to find the necessary funds to support a proper correctional facility. The need of an appropriate building to function as a school/therapy center and the employment of professionals in the field of education, psychology and social work is imperative. The prison management needs to start planning sentencing plan and take stock of the needs of female inmates. The needs of the female inmates are simple – belonging and work. If we manage to deliver what they need we would have helped them lead a fulfilling life and reduce recidivism.